

Creating and Sustaining Effective Partnerships

Partnership building is essentially about people agreeing to work together to get something done that they cannot accomplish alone. Like any human exercise, it requires commitment, creativity and a spirit of generosity to turn out well.

When the aim is to add value to an overall umbrella partnership – in this case the WorkSource one-stop system- it is vital to provide patience, support, transparency, understanding, responsiveness and innovations that complete the systemic business process and flow. This starts with identification of resources and includes open dialogue among staff members of all participating organizations as well as between leadership teams.

In association, this means redefining of “turf” to avoid granting exclusive ownership over an entire process when it takes many resources within a system to achieve a single job seeker’s success story. When these victories happen for individuals, it is important for the system as a whole to celebrate the achievement from the customers’ perspective, without claiming ownership of the steps the individuals have taken to achieve their goals.

Effective collaborating is the best route to achieving and sustaining the magic combination of affordable cost, excellent service delivery, and innovation for the future of the system.

There are two simple rules to sustain foundational partnership success:

1. Ensure shared vision, goals, plans, processes and allocation of responsibilities are deeply understood by all parties and drive the partnership. In other words:
 - a. live, breathe and speak the mission and goals as often as possible.
 - b. Build effective partnership with a focus on the mission, vision, and strategic plan of all parties involved.
 - c. Identify measurable outcomes and establish benchmarks with standards of service excellence to enhance the process.

With these action items in place, WorkSource can be established as the “go to” location for all service needs of the general job seeking public and business community.

2. Build in realistic and proportionate gain and risk sharing for every entity under the partnership umbrella.

Structure can have a profound impact on a partnership’s success. Often, partnerships opt to use loose, ad hoc processes, rather than investing the effort to develop explicit, enforceable rules and guidelines for interaction between the partners. This informality contributes many problems that plague institution-based partnerships: lack of accountability among invested members, dependence

of the group on a small handful of core leaders, and communication problems among members.

Benefits of Strengthening and Revisiting the Purpose of the WorkSource Partnership:

- Greater credibility: This is created through greater support for the organization's work because of their association with respected organizations.
- Expanded resource access: Monetary, structural, technology, and access to new processes and acute identification of innovative possibilities for growth.
- Improved skills and knowledge: Share insights, points of view, experiences, and capabilities that staff within a specific agency may not possess themselves.
- Expanded networks and relationships.
- Collaboration to identify and resolve problems, barriers and potential issues.

Who are partners to the WorkSource system?

- Business
- CBOs (community-based organizations – not-for-profit organizations)
- Government (local, regional, state and federal agencies and political entities)
- Foundations (community and private family)
- Labor
- Semi-Public Organizations (universities, colleges, health authorities, transportation, etc.)

Phases of Partnership Development

- Preparation – reviewing experience(s) with partnerships historically and in current time; identifying internal agency strengths and weaknesses that will be brought to the partnership or must change before entering into partnership with additional organizations.
- Planning the partnership – blueprints and construction of policies/procedures, delegating leads for partnership development processes to multiple organizations.
- Prospecting for the partnership – identifying, researching and screening possible partners.
- Developing the partnership – clarifying conduct expectations and responsibilities.

- Stewarding the partnership - monitoring actions, communications, and accountability with a team of trouble-shooters that can identify strategies to rectify issues and put them into action.
- Renewing the partnership – evaluating accountability, celebrating achievements, determining next steps, inviting innovation for further development steps to improve service to the public.

Challenges of Partnership

- Building trust relationships
- Clarifying accountabilities
- Ensuring sufficient resources
- Being clear about motivation
- Managing transition and change
- Making direct, solid, and purposeful deals
- Effectively communicating
- Staying on track with the partnership's mission, values, and strategic plan
- Dealing with conflict
- Avoiding burnout

Ingredients of Success

Building trusting and respectful relationships between diverse organizations is the most important and consistent ingredient in all successful partnerships. Below are some additional practices and tools to make your partnerships more effective for those whom you serve.

1. The central purpose of the WorkSource one-stop system is the job seeker's and employer's success (on their terms).
2. People need concrete results rather than the promise of results in order to stay engaged in the hard work and the extra investment that partnerships require.
3. Identify and agree on specific deliverables by the WorkSource system as a whole then strive for mutual accountability.
4. Acknowledge, understand, and learn how to bridge personal as well as agency cultural differences.
5. Allow partners to speak from their own experience. All voices are vital to the one-stop system. Everyone must feel comfortable sharing ideas without fear of criticism.
6. Guarantee every partner has a voice in meetings and within the internal dealings of the partnership. The best ideas often come from unexpected places.

7. Actively seek and solicit feedback. Make important decisions by consensus.
8. Every organization must contribute to the overall structure for the group effort to be successful.
9. Identify service duplication to increase overall efficiency of resource allocation and build trust within the partnership.
10. Collaborate whenever possible to strengthen the overall quality of the services. Share resources.
11. Value commitment, regardless of the size of the partner organization. Value all staff knowledge and contributions. Build a strong foundation based upon history. Creating effective partnerships cannot be reduced to simple formulas and techniques. Each partnership is unique and requires different things to be ultimately and continuously effective in serving the public.
12. Dedicate time and effort to the partnership itself. Devote hours across the board to make the WorkSource environment a successful and sustaining one for all partners, internal and external.
13. Learn from mistakes. Be resilient. Partnerships usually require effort.